



***The Second
Reformation***

Part 1

Steve Highlander

The Second Reformation
Part 1: Defining God's Work since the 1500s
By Dr. Steve Highlander

In December 2008 then President George W. Bush finally declared America was in a recession. It would appear that an event is not legitimate until someone says it is. So let me declare the fact that The Church of Jesus Christ is in the midst of a SECOND REFORMATION.

On October 31, 1517 catholic priest Martin Luther nailed his list of 95 issues of debate on the door of the castle church at Wittenberg, Germany. And, although there were people before and after Luther, most New Testament historians refer to this act as the beginning of the Protestant Reformation of the Church.

Luther had no intention of creating a different church and probably had no clue the far reaching implications of his actions would bring. Often it is only in historical perspective we can see how significant a thing really is. Luther wanted to change His church. It was only after the Catholic Church refused to hear him and threatened to kill him did he leave the Catholic system to start a new expression of faith and practice.

Today there is a new reformation taking place as significant as the one fostered by Luther, Calvin, Count Zinzendorf, Zwingli, Calvin and others. Probably only time will tell when it actually started and how far reaching its impact will be, but the fact is it is affecting millions of Christians in the US and around the world.

I recently heard a prominent pastor say he had "packed his bags and left the Charismatic Movement." He was quick to qualify the statement by saying "he packed his bags," meaning he took some things with him from the Charismatic movement, but that movement as a whole no longer expressed the totality of his Christianity.

What an excellent analogy this is. Luther and the other reformers did the same thing. They didn't reject wholesale the doctrines and practices of the church to which they belonged. They took many of those things with them into their new church experience. Looking back, some think they didn't do enough reform – but let's acknowledge that God was leading and restoring a few things at a time and, to borrow a scriptural phrase, "they served God in their generation."

Defining REFORMATION

According to Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary Reformation is defined in part as:

"The act of reforming, or the state of being reformed; change from worse to better; correction or amendment of life, manners, or of anything vicious or corrupt; as, the reformation of manners; reformation of the age; reformation of abuses."

It further adds:

"Reformation is a more thorough and comprehensive change than reform. It is applied to subjects that are more important, and results in changes which are more lasting. A reformation involves, and is followed by, many particular reforms."

Following the dynamics of this definition there are several important facets of reformation:

1. It is more significant and long term than simple changes in the way things are done.
2. It involves more important issues.

3. The results have ongoing effect beyond the initial participants.
4. It is not merely initiated by changes (reforms) but continues to spark changes as it progresses.

We can see these dynamics of reformation are embodied in the first reformation of the 16th century. It follows that we will see the same dynamics marking the 2nd reformation which is happening now.

Revivals, Awakenings, Renewals, Movements

The Church of Jesus Christ is organic, not static. It lives and breathes. Scripturally it is always defined as the PEOPLE of God, not a building or organization. The church does not exist where the people of God do not meet.

Throughout Church history the Church has gone through many changes, some good, some not so good. Usually though, those changes were initially positive, in response to something in the church that had gone wrong or had been neglected.

For example Monasticism (GREEK monos = alone), a movement in which people left the world and entered into a monastery, convent, or other closed society in an effort to shut out worldly influences and concentrate on God, came about in response to the absolute worldliness of the church at the time. It was a genuine response on the part of those who wanted to be more Godly and devoted. Over time monasticism generated its own set of problems resulting in another response of people leaving those societies to practice their faith in the context of reaching others with the gospel message.

With the reformation God made a few adjustments at a time. When one movement became stagnant God began to restore other doctrines or practices, slowly returning the church to its New Testament roots of faith and practice. Two things happened. A group of people began to want more from their experience with God. They hungered for a fresh touch and a fresh revelation. The movement of which they were a part had started to gel into predictable patterns. Often the 2nd and 3rd generations of a movement heard the stories, but no longer felt the original power of the Spirit that birthed the movement. Unwilling to settle for the testimonies, many in these movements echoed the sentiments of Gideon long ago, "If God is for us where are all the miracles we heard about from our fathers?"

As a result those who were satisfied and did not want change began to resist. This created a division that ultimately led to a separation as the new movement was persecuted by the old movement.

The people of the new movement went on with God into the new elements being restored to the Church, while the old movement settled into static denominations that have basically remained unchanged since their inception.

Different terms have been used to describe the Spirit of the Lord moving in His church through the ages. We have heard of revivals, renewals, awakenings and movements. It is important for us to understand that these terms are not used interchangeably.

Revival

Revival is a term often used in the church today in a very misleading way. When someone says, "revival," we often think of a "revival meeting." However revival itself is something much more significant. In fact a revival meeting can take place without revival happening at all or vice versa.

Revival comes from the Latin word "vive" meaning "life". So Revival would signify a rebirth or renewing of life to something from which life had started to slip away. Revival by its nature is a move of God in His people. For you can not bring life to something again if it did not have life in the first place. Revival is what happens in a person, church, or group of churches when God pours new life into them.

Two particularly well known revivals were the Welsh Revival (1904 - 1905) and the Pentecostal revival which began at the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles, California in 1906. Both of these revivals touched the world in lasting ways.

Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.com) has this to say about revival:

“Christian revival is a term that generally refers to a specific period of increased spiritual interest or renewal in the life of a church congregation or many churches, either regionally or globally. This should be distinguished from the use of the term “revival” to refer to a highly emotional evangelistic meeting or series of meetings either in a church building or a large tent or even in the open air. While elements such as mass conversions of non-believers and perceived beneficial effects on the moral climate of a given culture may be involved, revivals are seen by many Christians as being the restoration of the church itself to a vital and fervent relationship with God after a period of decline. The word “church” here referring to the body of believers in Christ as a whole and not to any particular group or denomination among them.” (Emphasis mine.)

The danger of course is equating revival with revival meetings. Revival meetings are often lively, spontaneous events with a lot of evidence of God’s Spirit working in the lives of people. They are exciting and regenerating by nature. They impart life to dry thirsty souls. People often chase revivals, because of the atmosphere and excitement. This is the danger. Americans seem to want to live in a perpetual state of exciting revival meetings.

But, if the purpose of revival is to bring new life, what happens AFTER that new life is imparted. For the person who has been revived the revival meeting is somewhat a moot point. Yes they can still receive encouragement and see God work, and the excitement is still there, but the danger is thinking that the revival meeting is the end all. Sustained revival, by its nature needs those who need revival, not just the continued interest of those who have been revived. This is the main reason revivals tend to die down or out after a period of time. Those who have been revived stop bringing those who need revival and the meeting ceases to be a revival meeting, because few are being revived.

Those that have been revived need to LIVE OUT the new life they have received, not just seek to soak in more meetings. This is another reason why it seems in history God has moved in waves. The Spirit seems to ebb and flow through periods of history. God brings revival, awakening, renewal or other spiritual movements that blaze brightly for period of time. Afterwards those who have been touched by God need to settle into living out the new life they have received of the Lord. This includes applying the truths and practices the Spirit has fostered in their midst. The purpose of revival is to produce new life and the purpose of that new life is so that we might live it out for the benefit of the Kingdom of God. True revival may touch us, but it isn’t about us. Falsely equating revival with revival meetings has a tendency to spawn spiritual excesses as men try to continue beyond where the Spirit of God has led.

Awakening

Another term we use for a sovereign move of God is Awakening. There appears to be four awakenings in American history. We often find awakening taking place just prior to a major war.

The term “Great Awakening” refers to a period of time in early American history (1730 – 1770) when hundreds of thousands of people in Great Britain and the colonies were drawn to the Lord by the power of the Spirit. This awakening took place just prior to the Revolutionary war. George Whitfield and Johnathan Edwards were key players during this time. Their unique preaching style fanned the flames of the awakening while generally angering the traditional churches.

The second great awakening occurred from 1790 – 1840. This awakening took place just prior to the Civil War and probably sparked some of the anti-slavery sentiments that led to the war. Probably the

best known evangelist during this time was Charles G. Finney. This Awakening sparked the church to get involved in social changes like prison reform, anti-slavery and the temperance movement. The famous Cane Ridge Revival drew thousands and camp meetings sprung up around the south. Methodists, Baptists and Presbyterians generally participated in these meetings and took much of their denominational character from them for a period of time. In 1793 William Carey, known as the "Father of Modern Missions," set sail from England to India, to forever impact the way foreign missions operated.

The third awakening is generally recognized from 1850's - 1900, further sparking social consciousness and religious fervor. This awakening started during the Civil War lasting to a period just prior to World War I. D.L. Moody was the most famous preacher of the age. Additionally the Salvation Army invaded America with its particular brand of fiery preaching and social justice. The YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) also grew rapidly in American cities during this period. On the down side three false cults, started a couple of decades earlier, grew and flourished during these years. Joseph Smith and Brigham Young spread Mormonism, Mary Eddy Baker founded Christian Science and Charles Taz Russell promoted the Jehovah's Witness movement. Another spiritual force came from this period as missionaries spread out all over the world from England and America. One of the most significant was Hudson Taylor who founded China Inland Mission and literally changed how western missionaries approached the work in different cultures.

The fourth Awakening, taking place from 1960's through the early 1980's, is still debated as a genuine awakening. This dynamic movement is probably better termed a RENEWAL, since the main thrust was among denominational Christians. During this time the Charismatic Renewal was birthed and flourished for about 20 years as millions of denominational Christians experienced the "Baptism of the Holy Spirit", speaking in other tongues and manifesting the nine gifts of the Spirit outlined in I Corinthians Chapter 12. Many left denominational Churches and started non-denominational churches as the controversy over the gift of tongues grew. The Jesus People movement of the mid to late 60's brought a religious counter-culture in the midst of the social counter-culture taking place. While the Charismatic Renewal primarily affected Christians, the Jesus People movement was more evangelical. This movement took place during the Vietnam War. The result of this period was the rapid growth of non-denominational churches and parachurch ministries. Social concerns involved the sexual revolution, gay rights and abortion. Many churches and ministries became defined by their opposition to these social issues. It is interesting to note that the Catholic Church was particularly impacted by the Charismatic renewal in ways that no other awakening or revival had been able to do.

As we have seen, Awakenings occurred at strategic times in American history. They generally impacted massive amounts of non-Christians with sweeping evangelism and explosive church growth across most denominations embracing the Awakenings.

Renewals and Movements

It is a little known fact that on December 31, 1900, the "day between the centuries," Pope Leo XIII received a vision from God concerning the 20th century. On January 1, 1901 at a service in His church in Rome he prayed, dedicating the 20th century to the Holy Spirit and leading the congregation in the hymn "Come Holy Spirit." At the same time on the other side of the world a small group of students at Charles Parnham's Bible school in Topeka, KS were studying the second chapter of Acts and praying for the Holy Spirit Baptism. On December 31, 1900 Agnes Ozman asked for the laying on of hands that she might be filled with the Holy Spirit. The Next day, January 1, 1901, the first day of the first year of the new century, she started speaking in tongues and reportedly spoke nothing but Chinese for three days. It is generally acknowledged that she was the first of the modern Pentecostals to experience the Baptism of the Spirit and the gift of tongues. Truly God birthed the cry in Leo XIII's spirit and responded immediately.

The Pentecostal Movement, the Latter Rain Movement and the Charismatic Renewal (movement) are three examples of Renewals that have taken place in the last 100 years or so, sparked as it seems by Leo's prayer of dedication. A renewal is somewhat different than a revival or awakening. The purpose of revival was to bring new life to a dead church. The purpose of awakening was to touch the world with conviction for the purpose of evangelism. However, the purpose of renewal was to restore something that had been lost.

In addition to the standard definition of RENEWAL, Worldnet 3.0 (from Princeton University) offers this interesting definition: "The conversion of wasteland into land suitable for use of habitation or cultivation." And "filling again by supplying what has been used up." Both of these observations seem to earmark spiritual renewals.

Hosea 10:12 says, "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground. For *it is* time to seek Jehovah, until He comes and rains righteousness on you." NKJV

Of course the primary distinction of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements was the "filling" of the Holy Spirit in a person's life.

The Pentecostal Movement

Spiritual gifts and manifestations, including speaking in tongues have been documented throughout church history where ever God was moving by His Spirit in fresh ways. However, the Pentecostal Movement, by most accounts, birthed at the Azusa Street Mission in 1907, brought the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts into the main stream of American religious experience and defined a movement. From Azusa Street the sparks of revival and renewal spread around the world igniting Pentecostal fires where ever they landed. Truly the spiritual gifts were renewed in the church. Worldnet's definition of "filling again" seems appropriate. The spiritual gifts, mostly lost to the church for 1700 years, were once again restored.

Out of this movement the mainline Pentecostal denominations were formed, such at the Assemblies of God, the Four Square Church and the Pentecostal Church of God, among others.

The Latter Rain Movement

After the Pentecostal Movement began to wane through the 1930's and into World War II, God brought a fresh Renewal of the spiritual gifts to the Church in what has been called the Latter Rain Movement. Latter Rain got its name from passages of scripture such as Joel 2:23 which prophesy about God giving the early and late (latter) rain in the first month. The former or early rain prepared the ground for planting and the latter (more abundant) rain came just prior to harvest time. Taking the passage in a prophetic sense, Latter Rain participants saw this as God giving a great outpouring of His Spirit just before the last days worldwide harvest of souls.

The latter Rain movement began in 1948. It is prophetically significant that three things happened that year. Besides the Latter Rain outpouring on the church, Israel became a sovereign nation again for the first time since about 150 BC. Prophetically, this single event started a countdown clock for the last days. The third event that took place was the formation of the World Council of Churches, a liberal organization that seeks to promote any and all religions equally. Anyone with discernment can see that 1948 was a significant year for the God and satan.

The significance of the Latter Rain movement was two-fold. The first was the message and the second was the method. The message of the Latter Rain Movement was for Christians to come out of the denominational churches that had stagnated. The method was healing revivals held in huge tent meetings. (The significance of which was that they were outside the established church structure.) Several key names were prominent in these healing revivals: A. A. Allen, Oral Roberts, Jack Coe,

William Branham, Paul Cain and others. The Latter Rain Movement brought a fresh wind of the Spirit to the Church and caught the attention of millions who flocked to tents and auditoriums to hear the prophetic word and to be healed. It is of interest to note that the Latter Rain Movement carried the US through the Korean War.

As the Spirit of God began moving in the Latter Rain Movement many denominational people received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and left mainline churches (even Pentecostal ones – the Assemblies of God fought the revivals). A new wave of power evangelism swept the country as people saw the power of God manifested in physical healing. Many new Pentecostal churches were formed and many new converts were brought into the church. Unfortunately this movement lost its momentum due to its key leaders falling into various sins. It has been said that the demise of the movement came because of “gold, glory and girls.” However, the Latter Rain Movement was a genuine outpouring of God’s Spirit as He prepared His church for the next phase of renewal: The Charismatic Movement that touched the denominational churches unlike anything in the past.

The Charismatic Renewal

Church historians point to Dennis and Rita Bennett as the parents of the Charismatic Movement. Dennis was an Episcopal priest, pastoring a church with a membership of 2600. On April 3, 1960 he announced from the pulpit that he had been filled with the Holy Spirit and had spoken in other tongues. As a result he was asked to resign from the church. The Bennetts were instrumental in taking the Charismatic experience to the denominations.

Distinct from the Pentecostal Movement, the Charismatic Renewal saw an outpouring of spiritual gifts on the average Christian. Without the trappings of Pentecostal theology, many people came out of the denominational churches to form non-denominational churches, often bringing much of the practice and theology of their old denominations with them. Where once people were generally identified by and worshipped with people of like belief systems (i.e. their denominational doctrinal statement and liturgy) the Charismatics found themselves worshipping alongside Catholics, Baptists, Methodists, Episcopalians, Lutherans and Christians from almost all denominations. Independent, non-denominational churches flourished as people left the restricting confines of the denominations to experience “body ministry” where every person could minister and be ministered to.

God was breaking the denominational system and, for the most part since that time, the denominations have taken a sharp decline in membership while non-denominational churches have grown exponentially, often resulting in the Mega Church phenomenon. Prominent personages of the Charismatic Renewal were Kenneth Haggan, Derek Prince, Kenneth Copeland and a host of others associated with them.

The Charismatic Movement not only brought a restoration of the Spiritual Gifts to the general Christian populace, but it broke the stifling power of denominationalism and positioned the Church of Jesus Christ to move into the 21st century and the last days.

I want to add an interesting side note at this point. While I can provide no documentation for the following story and can not remember the name of the preacher, I heard the testimony in a message in the 1980s. I believe the prophecy is true, because hindsight bears it out. The significance of the prophecy will be self evident I think.

A prominent preacher who often worked with three other preachers called all three one day in 1948 or '49 and told them God had shown him he was going to die and go to heaven the next week. But, he said, God had given him a prophetic word that He was restoring the five-fold ministry to the church. He declared that the 1950's would be the decade of the evangelist, the '60s the decade of the pastor, the '70s of the teacher, the '80s of the prophet and the '90s the decade of the apostle.

It makes sense that God would do this. Each decade God would release a ministry into the church and emphasize it so it could be perfected and accepted. Both the timing and the order of ministry is significant. The timing being the last five decades of the 20th century. A century remember, that had been dedicated to the Holy Spirit and leading up to the 2000th year since the birth of Christ.

The order of restoration is also significant in that the Evangelist converts the lost, then they need pastors to guide them. Next they need teachers to disciple them (“go ye into all the world and make disciples teaching them...”). After teaching and training the church needs prophetic guidance and finally the restoration of the apostolic gifts to bring order and stability to the new church emerging in the 21st century.

Since the 1500s God has been working to restore the church to its first century expression of faith and practice. Slowly, through reformation, revivals, awakenings and renewals He has brought us to the present day reformation. A reformation that will prepare the Church for the final conflict and the second coming of Jesus.

It is interesting to note that the last truth lost, the message of salvation by faith, was the first truth restored in the reformation of the 1500s. The verse that God used to spark reformation in Martin Luther’s heart was, “a man shall live by faith.”

From there God worked backward restoring one truth and scriptural practice at a time until He has brought us back again to first century Christianity. Today the reformation taking place is restoring the organic purity, power and structure of the early church without all of the man-made religious add-ons we so often associate with church today.

To step back and see the sweeping hand of God in human history is an awesome thing. To think that we are a part of what He is doing in our generation is more awesome still.

God will have a Church without spot and wrinkle in the last days. A church that reflects the full measure of Christ’s own ministry on the earth. A church that is not controlled by men, but by the Holy Spirit. That He would have such a church has never be the question. The real question is, “will you and I be a part of it?”

Throughout Church history some have responded to the Spirit as He marches ever forward in reformation, revival and renewal. Others have fought the changes and refused to move on, preferring to stay with the previous revelation.

Centuries ago Joshua, Moses’ successor, was ready to die and called the children of Israel together to rehearse the nation’s history in their ears. He ended with a challenge, “choose you this day whom you will serve but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

The Bible tells us, “redeem the time, for the days are evil.” We do not have a lot of time to play with the things of God. Either we are moving forward or we are choosing to stay behind.

Today, I ask you, “which path will you take?”
May the Lord richly bless you on the journey.

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